

Decision 02-11-009 November 7, 2002

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

C.W. Lee,

Complainant,

vs.

California Water Service Company,

Defendant.

(ECP)

Case 02-03-021

(Filed March 19, 2002)

C.W. Lee, for himself, Complainant.

J. Shuppe, for Defendant.

OPINION DENYING RELIEF

Complainant alleges that California Water Service Company (Cal Water) often changes the amount of his check to some other amount. Three checks have been cashed for amounts different than he intended:

1. Check # 15051 for \$25.12 was cashed for \$24.54,
2. Check # 15062 for \$24.29 was cashed for \$24.39, and
3. Check # 15101 for \$20.06 was cashed for \$20.02.

Complainant requests the following relief:

1. The Commission order Cal Water not to change the dollar amount of checks it processes from customers.
2. The Commission order Cal Water to revise its billing process and format its bills to display the previous balance owed, and to show the most recent payment received.

3. The Commission order Cal Water to provide Dr. Lee with a detailed analysis of his account starting with the first bill issued in 2001 and continuing to a date set by the Commission.

Cal Water states that Complainant's requests have no merit and that the complaint should be dismissed. Public hearing was held September 23, 2002, before Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Robert Barnett.

Cal Water's witness acknowledged that check # 15051, 15072, and 15101 were processed for amounts other than stated on the checks. He said Cal Water processes approximately 450,000 checks per month. An automated process is employed, which is standard in the industry. Attached to each customer bill is a "return portion" of the bill which has preprinted the total amount due. Cal Water's automated system reads the total amount due on the return portion of the bill and bar codes the check with this amount unless the total amount due has been changed or Cal Water personnel recognize that amounts differ.

Potential processing errors occur when the total amount due on the return portion of the bill does not match the amount payable on the check. As an example, for check # 15101, the return portion of the bill showed total due \$20.02 and Dr. Lee's check was for \$20.06. Cal Water does not alter the amount payable on the check. It only provides the bank with a bar code amount for processing. Cal Water uses and the bank accepts this automated method to process Cal Water's volume and to lower Cal Water's processing costs, which are passed on to its customers.

We will not order defendant to revise its billing process for 450,000 checks per month because one customer found a trivial billing error three times over a five-month period.

Michael Peevey is the Assigned Commissioner and Robert Barnett is the assigned ALJ.

O R D E R

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. The relief requested is denied. The money on deposit with the Commission shall be disbursed to defendant.
2. This proceeding is closed.

This order is effective today.

Dated November 7, 2002, at San Francisco, California.

LORETTA M. LYNCH
President
HENRY M. DUQUE
CARL W. WOOD
GEOFFREY F. BROWN
MICHAEL R. PEEVEY
Commissioners